

## Colorful Founder of Cropsey

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Andrew Jackson Cropsey was born December 22, 1823, in Niagara County, New York, to Daniel W. Cropsey (1797-1882) and Elizabeth Straight Cropsey (1797-1871). Andrew left home to go to Cincinnati to become a lawyer. In 1847, he married Maria Jane Harrington (1825-1874). She was an accomplished daughter of a widow living in the suburbs of Cincinnati. She was skilled at sewing and made dresses for a neighborhood clientele.

A.J. Cropsey had four sons by his first wife. They were Daniel Burns Cropsey, Louis Edward Cropsey, Allen J. Cropsey, and Cassius M. Cropsey. Two additional sons died in infancy.

After two years of practice as a lawyer in Cincinnati, he moved to Will County, where his parents had moved. In 1854, Andrew moved to what is now Cropsey Township. He was the first settler in the Cropsey area. A.J. Cropsey did not remain long. He moved to Fairbury, the nearest railroad point to his farm.

Fairbury was founded in 1857 by Caleb Patten when the railroad tracks were laid. In 1859, Mr. Patton disposed of his interest in the town lots to Andrew J. Cropsey. Mr. Cropsey became a major real estate developer in the new village of Fairbury.

In the 1860 U.S. Census, A.J. Cropsey was shown living in Indian Grove Township. His occupation was listed as a farmer. He had \$8,000 in real estate and \$2,000 in his personal estate. This net worth would be equivalent to \$288,000 in today's dollars.

In April of 1860, A.J. Cropsey was selected to be a representative at the famous Wigwag Illinois Republican convention held in Decatur, Illinois. The term wigwag was borrowed from the Native American term for a temporary structure. The gathering was held on May 9, 1860, and involved some 2,500 people. A tent 100 feet wide and 70 feet deep was procured from a local circus company to house the crowd.

The Illinois Republicans adopted a resolution stating, "That Abraham Lincoln is the first choice of Illinois for the Presidency, and that our delegates be instructed to use all honorable means for his nomination at the Chicago convention, and to cast their votes as a unit for him." Less than a week later, the National Republican Convention opened in Chicago, and the Illinois Republicans kept their word and nominated Lincoln for President. A.J. Cropsey likely met Abraham Lincoln at this nominating convention.

Within about a year and a half after attending the Decatur convention, A.J. Cropsey helped organize the 129th Illinois Infantry. The regiment was organized on September 8, 1862, with George P. Smith, of Dwight, as Colonel; Henry Case, of Winchester, Lieutenant Colonel; and A. J. Cropsey, of Fairbury, Major. Mr. Cropsey recruited Fairbury area men to form Company E.

After the Civil War ended, he moved his family to the Lincoln, Nebraska area. He was one of the early developers of Lincoln. Some of his Civil War comrades from Fairbury moved with him to Lincoln, Nebraska.

Mr. Cropsey's first wife died in 1874 when he was 51 years old. Andrew then married thirty-three-year-old Emma Francis Rockwood (1842 - 1917). She was the daughter of John & Delia (Cummings) Rockwood. Emma made the trek, with her parents, from Vermont to McHenry County, Illinois, by wagon train when she was five years old.

Emma grew to adulthood on her father's farm and became a school teacher. In 1875 she took a teaching job in Lincoln, Nebraska. Emma returned home that summer but was followed by a young widower she had met in Nebraska. Emma married Andrew J. Cropsey in August of 1875 in McHenry County, Illinois.

A.J. Cropsey was a major real estate developer in Lincoln, Nebraska. He was prominent in developing University Place and Nebraska Wesleyan University. Cropsey was elected to the state senate in 1870 while he conducted a significant real estate business and was a partner in Capitol Mills. The following year, A.J. Cropsey built a large house at 1421 H St. on land he purchased from Gov. David Butler. Cropsey purchased all of Block 151, directly south of the Capitol, from the governor. Almost immediately, it became unclear if the land was ever technically Butler's to sell. There were no records showing that Butler had bought the property from the state as he claimed.

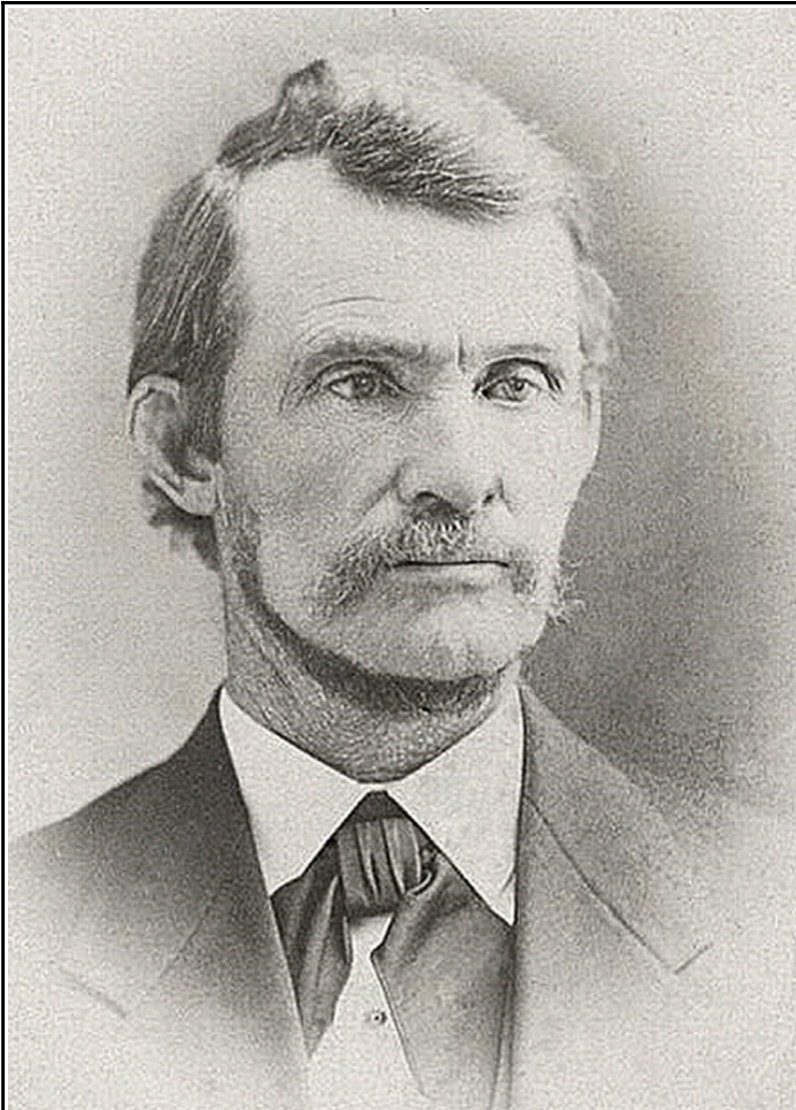
Cropsey began construction of his large, two-story, brick and stone, 15-room home on two of the 12 lots on the block in 1870. Described in detail as the Meier House in Bess Streeter Aldrich's "Spring Came On Forever," the home, one of the finest in the city, was completed in 1871.

In the spring of 1871, soon after taking office for his third term, eleven articles of impeachment were brought against Governor Butler. The first charged him with misuse of some \$16,000 from the state school fund. Butler had allegedly made personal use of this money to purchase lots in the new city of Lincoln. Butler sold some of these lots to A.J. Cropsey. Butler was suspended from office by the Supreme Court and subsequently tried by the State Senate. He was convicted on the first charge, although the remaining ten were dropped. The Supreme Court then removed him from office on June 2, 1871.

A.J. Cropsey suffered several financial reversals. After one of these failures, he relocated from Lincoln, Nebraska, to Texas. From there, he returned to Lincoln. Again having financial troubles, A.J. Cropsey removed to Ogden UT. He died in Ogden at the age of 72 in 1896. He was buried in the Mountain View Cemetery in Ogden, Utah.

Other people occupied Cropsey's beautiful house in Lincoln after his death. Eventually, it sat vacant for ten years. The empty house was acquired by the state of Nebraska and razed for the construction of the present governor's mansion.

A.J. Cropsey was a Civil War hero and led a very colorful life in both Illinois and Nebraska. The town of Cropsey and Cropsey Township were both named after him. The Fairbury Echoes Museum has a colorful Civil War poster showing the entire roster of Cropsey's Company E.



A. J. Cropsey (1823-1896)